



COMPETITIONS: STARTING SHEETS

Ray Burniston gives guidelines on how to run a smooth club competition.

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Most clubs will use pre-booking starting sheets for competitions. The important thing to remember is that whatever timing you allow for it is only possible to get a certain number of players on the course in each hour. Trying to get players off at six minute intervals will only result in long hold ups as the day goes on, some clubs insert a break every so often to try to avoid this.

The length of the first five holes will also either cause further restrictions or make it easier. If you open with a par three hole then you will have to allow sufficient time for players to clear the green. The best opening sequence is to start with a par 4 hole of about 380 yards then follow with another par 4 slightly longer. If you can avoid a par 3 until at least the fifth or sixth hole so much the better. The following interval format will generally work at most clubs whatever the length of the first five holes.

- ⌘ 2 Ball Matches 8 minutes
- ⌘ 3 Ball Matches 10 minutes
- ⌘ 4 Ball Matches 10 minutes

Having an official starter for competitions will usually act as an incentive to get members off the tee on time. For major competitions then ball spotters on the opening holes if you have problem areas will almost certainly speed up play or at least keep players on the move.

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Starting Times/Sheets

An ever-increasing number of clubs have starting sheets not only for competitions but also for every day play including social/friendly golf. Much will depend on the flow of play on the course as to whether you need to adopt this policy.

Remember that if you have starting sheets you will need a firm policy on control and rules on members entering names. Most clubs will have the keen member who will arrive at the club as you post the starting sheet on the board and put the names of half the club on it. Subsequently most of them will withdraw leaving the sheet a covered with names crossed out and others written above them.

Penalties are often in place for members who fail to turn up for the monthly medal even though they had booked a time. This often stops others from playing, resulting in a two ball in the middle of three balls or even worse a member left high and dry. Several clubs will ban such a member from entering at least the next competition or worse.

Next you have to determine the actual time gaps for starting. Nothing is worse than to arrive at your club for a two o'clock starting time to find times are running some twenty five minutes or so late. This can often be the result of bad weather, perhaps fog/mist, heavy rain or delay caused through thunder and lightning. However in many cases, it is the result of trying to fit the maximum number of times in to let everybody play. If you study the time taken by players to tee up and drive off especially at the first hole and one minute a player, then it soon becomes apparent that five minutes for a two ball and seven minutes for three ball will not be enough.

Also you have to take into account the layout of the course. If you open with a par 3 then play can only commence when the players have vacated the green. Some clubs have rules that you wait before putting and let the next pairings drive off from the tee before you putt out.

In my experience this actually increases the time players take and are usually best avoided. I can well remember arriving at such a hole a few years ago in a regional meeting to find some four lots of players on the hole either searching for their balls or waiting to play. Sensible timing at a par three opening hole can help get the players nicely spread around the course.

It can help if you have somebody assisting the starter on the day of a major competition to make sure players report in good time. It is possible for a player to lose all sense of time when preparing to play especially if they are nervous.

The chart below gives you a rough guide to sensible starting times but you have to take into account the course layout.

Competition Type	Time allowance
2 Ball & Foursomes	6 - 8 minutes
3 Ball	9 - 10 minutes
4 Ball & Greensomes	10 - 12 minutes

Competitions such as a Texas Scramble will often need far longer than the norm. It is easy to check if the timings are right if at the end of the day you are still keeping to time. If you have had no unexpected hold ups and you are more than ten minutes behind, then you need to alter your starting times to accommodate this.

Sometimes a few alterations to the course such as cutting back the rough at the opening holes can help the situation. For Open Meetings sensibly placed ball spotters on the course can keep play on the move.

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